



King County

Ron Sims

King County Executive

**King County Charter Review Commission
Public Hearing Summary – June 28, 2007
Kent Senior Center, 6:30pm-7:20pm**

The 2007-2008 Charter Review Commission held its third of nine public hearings on Tuesday June 28, 2007 at the Kent Senior Center. The purpose of the meetings is to gather input from the public on how the county charter should be amended.

Commissioner Tara Jo Heinecke chaired the meeting. Other commissioners in attendance were Kirstin Haugen, Terry Lavender, Allan Munro, and John Jensen. Councilmember Julia Patterson was also present.

Ms. Heinecke gave opening remarks and introduced the staff and commissioners.

Commission staff member Mark Yango then gave a presentation on the charter and the charter review process.

Ms. Heinecke invited Councilmember Patterson to address the hearing. Councilmember Patterson thanked the commission for its work, and expressed her interest in seeing the amendments proposed by the commission.

Ms. Heinecke then opened the floor for citizen comments.

12 citizens were present at the meeting.

Summary of issues:

Campaign Finance Reform (3 comments)

- In favor of campaign finance reform (3 people)

Instant Runoff Voting (2 comments)

- In favor of Instant Runoff Voting (2 people)

Charter Commission Amendments (1 comment)

- CRC amendments should go straight to the ballot (1 person)

Nonpartisan Elections (2 comments)

- In favor of a nonpartisan King County government (1 person)
- Keep the King County government partisan (1 person)

Regional Committees (1 comment)

- No change to King County's Regional Committees (1 person)

Director of Elections Position (1 comment)

- Preferred appointed (1 person)
- Preferred appointed (1 person)

King County Auditor Position (1 comment)

- Preferred elected (1 person)

King County Auditor Position (1 comment)

- Preferred elected (1 person)

King County Library System (1 comment)

- Increase hours of operation (1 person)

King County Executive Compensation (1 comment)

- Reduce Salary from 1.5X councilmembers to 1.25 (1 person)

At Large Voting for councilmembers (1 comment)

- In favor of at-large voting for King County Councilmembers (1 person)

Unincorporated Areas Representation (1 comment)

- Reduce the power of the large city vote (1 person)

Paid Signature Gathering (2 comment)

- Prohibit the use of paid signature gatherers (2 people)

Whistleblower protection (1 comment)

- In favor of whistle blower protection for King County employees (1 people)

Property Tax Relief/Protection (1 comment)

- In favor of tax relief from exorbitant property taxes (1 people)

Summary of Comments by Name:

Bob Loeliger, of Kent (Representing the 33rd District Democrats):

- Campaign finance reform is the best way to represent the people with the minimum amount of expenditures. It minimizes outside and special interests' influence on elections
- Instant Runoff Voting allows a person to rank his candidate preference. This is the best way to run elections. There is a lot of concern about using private machines with private software to run elections. We need to open source software to review and create a paper trail.

Ms. Heinecke asked the question on IRV, different version- preference for top vote getters irrespective of party to move forward, or within a party.

Mr. Loeliger replied that we should propose to be open to all parties without any limits, not like a primary. We should be open to voters and let them decide who their preferences are. Source of information based on IRVWA.org.

Miriam Helgeland – of West Hill (Member of the Charter Review Commission in 1997):

- The county council accepts very few of the commission's recommendations and sometimes makes recommendations of their own. She would like to see recommendations go directly to the ballot although the current initiative process could fill this need.
- Non-partisan elections. 97: 'allow the voters to determine ... whether offices should be partisan or nonpartisan'. We should recommend this again. We should further recommend that they actually be nonpartisan.
- The County should not do anything drastic with the regional committees, and the cities on them. We want a true regional government.
- The elections director should remain appointed. It requires expertise in orchestrating the activities involved in an election. Someone who makes policy should be elected.
- In regards to public campaign financing we need to have a clean elections group running things. Residents in Maine and Arizona have that and it is inexpensive.
- Agree with IRV elections, also on a non-partisan basis. Few people vote in the primaries. Better to have them all on one ballot.

Ms. Lavender mentioned that we our regional committees have 6 councilmembers on 3 regional committees. Now with only 9 councilmembers it would be difficult to fulfill this role.

Ms. Helgeland didn't know what to do about this.

Ms. Lavender then suggested that they need to be on at least 2 and sometimes 3 committees.

Ms. Helgeland then replied, that maybe fewer councilmembers on the committee, but then they are not in a good position. Council was overpowering the city people at the beginning. Chairmen used to not ever be city people. The mayors can be quite adamant that it's hard to get along with the County. We need to fix the committees in some way.

Goodspaceguy Nelson, of West Seattle:

- The auditor's office should be elected. The auditing function would be much more effective. Financial and performance audits should be conducted by the auditor's office.
- The library system could be much better. The hours are restricted, when new libraries are being built. Not open at 8am or 10pm. Libraries are one of the main methods of continuing education. Important to keep libraries open at citizen's

convenience. Council ratifies trustee appointments. CRC should think of some way to keep libraries open.

- Compensation of the executive - executive is compensated at 1.5x a councilmembers salary. That is too much. Reduce to 1.25x.
- In favor of at-large voting for County Councilmembers

Mr. Jensen replied that the hours of library operation are not within the Commission's purview, but oversight may be within our power.

Larry Clements, of Kent (Received a postcard):

- Electing the director of elections. Yes, failure should result in firing in an election or at a recall election.
- Unincorporated areas representation- Reduce the power of the large city vote most effectively by the initiative process. The outcome of an election is heavily centered in the Seattle area. It doesn't give proper representation to those in the outerlying areas.
- Prohibit paid signature gathering for campaigns. Signature gathering should be done voluntarily on their own time.
- Supports whistleblower protection for employees. This should be in the state constitution. People should feel free to express your opinion about the state in which we live.
- Does not support making county council positions non-partisan. Partisanship is too important.
- Supports campaign finance reform. It is better to restrict the funds because it prohibits reasonable minds from entering the elections process.
- Local property taxes – Had a personal impact. In 2006, his taxes increased 64%. 2007 increased another 9%. It's not fair. What is the rationale behind this rate of increase? Council Council should give relief/protection. Would support setting limits on property tax increases.

Ends list of speakers. Questions from commissioners? Additional comments?

Mr. Jensen asked a question for Ms. Helgeland regarding the charter review process.

Ms. Helgeland replied that she would like to see another way to amend the charter. The state constitution cannot be changed by initiative; which maybe different because of size. But the people should have some way to change the charter. We didn't think this could be done. But maybe can be changed.

Mr. Nelson suggested that the Charter Review Commission should be elected. It would give more credibility if elected in the eyes of the people. Mr. Nelson also suggested that it would be easier to bring initiatives before the people. It requires a large number of signatures to get an initiative on the ballot, 4 or 5%. Easier for people to participate that way.

Mr. Loeliger mentioned that he was not sure if tax policies are part of the charter, but one of our larger problems involves transportation. One of the best ways we can address transportation would be to reduce our property taxes, which are regressive and currently inflation is boosting the prices of houses. Additional taxes on gasoline and petroleum products would give more flexibility to how the funds are used. We could have free, tax supported buses. Support additional gas taxes.

Mr. Loeliger also supports the prohibition on paid signature gathering since many of them know nothing about the issues. He would rather see more activism and getting people involved in their government.

Mr. Jensen asked him what would be the affects of Instant Runoff Voting?

Mr. Loeliger suggested that it would avoid confusion. In a runoff, you don't need more elections to decide a contested race. But makes the elections process slightly more complications, concerned with voting machines. They would need open source software to keep things above board. We would eliminate the need for primaries by putting all the candidates on the same ballot. But To have 9 people on the same ballot would be an extraordinary expense to win the election.

Ms. Lavender said that this issue is not something the charter review commission can address unless state law is first changed.

Mr. Loeliger replied that I-134 addressed elections issues. In one line, it took away the ability for localities to choose public financing. He would like to see that thrown out and public funding reinstated.

Councilmember Patterson said that in the state legislation we considered public financing but couldn't get the votes. She said it was an idea that's been around a long time. It's so distasteful to call people and ask for money. However, it is representative democracy and an expression of their freedom of speech. If your ideas are in sync with your community, you can raise money to run. But calling someone and trying to ease into the fundraising ask is very difficult. Some say it's good for public officials to go through that process, to hear why people will and won't support you. It's a complicated issue. Most other countries do not finance their campaigns like we do. We should look at how other democracies in other countries manage to finance their campaigns.

Mr. Nelson mentioned that it was good to have several appearances on KCTV by candidates. Also Public financing of the printed voters guide is very good. The state could copy the county on this.

Ms. Heinecke asked what is the state voter's guide?

Mr. Nelson replied that people didn't hear my message as a Libertarian for governor because there was no state voter's guide.

Ms. Helgeland mentioned that for IRV, you can vote for your second or third choice. If your first choice will never make it, your second choice will still be counted

Councilmember Patterson asked if this is a county or state issue?

Ms. Haugen replied that Pierce County just approved IRV last year on the recommendation of their CRC.

Ms. Helgeland also said that Arizona and Maine started with \$5 to finance campaigns. If they got a certain number of donations they qualified for public money. This received wide acceptance by the public.

Mr. Loeliger also said that campaign finance reform in Arizona and Maine also allows schoolteachers to run. President of the US can only be rich or famous. There were three bills before the legislature this year. 1- public financing; 2- BIAW put in a lot of \$ for SC races in the state; courts should be immune from money; 3- comprehensive elected official public funding.

Mr. Nelson also suggested a nonpartisan ballot to support 3rd party candidates. He complains that people cannot vote for the person of their choice in the 2-party primary.

Ms. Heinecke asked Councilmember Patterson about partisanship.

Councilmember Patterson said that the pros of partisanship is that the partisan label gives the public a general sense of the political perspective of each individual that's running. Democrats in general believe that government can make a positive difference in people lives. Republicans generally believe that you're better off if there's not so much government in your life. At least the label gives you that much. Nonpartisan pros are that when you label people they tend to herd together. Caucusing in council means you talk about important issues within your party.

Ms. Heinecke adjourned the meeting at 7:40pm.